

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 SAM-01 AID-20

COME-00 EB-11 FRB-02 TRSE-00 XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-02

LAB-06 SIL-01 STR-08 CEA-02 FEA-02 INT-08 ACDA-19

DRC-01 (ISO) W

----- 098610

O R 021340Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8366

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: POLITICAL DEADLOCK

REF: LONDON 2639

1. SUMMARY: AS OF NOON TODAY (MARCH 2), PRIME MINISTER
HEATH HAD NOT RESIGNED; NEITHER HAD HE INDICATED WHETHER
OR HOW HE WOULD SEEK TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT. NEITHER
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MAJOR PARTY CAN COMMAND AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE NEXT

PARLIAMENT, EITHER ON ITS OWN OR IN COMBINATION WITH ANY ONE OF THREE SMALLER GROUPS (LIBERALS, ANTI-SUNNINGDALE UNIONISTS, OR NATIONALISTS). THE NATION'S ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE NEED FOR STRONG MEASURES TO DEAL WITH IT URGENTLY INCREASE THE PRESSURE FOR A SPEEDY RESOLUTION OF THIS IMPASSE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRIME MINISTER REPORTED TO THE QUEEN YESTERDAY EVENING (MARCH 1) ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION BUT DID NOT OFFER HIS RESIGNATION. HE CONSULTED WITH HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES AND IS EXPECTED NOW TO TAKE SOUNDINGS AMONG OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES TO SEE WHETHER HE CAN FORM A GOVERNMENT. THE ARITHMETIC OF THE ELECTION RESULTS INDICATES THAT HE FACES A FORMIDABLE TASK (SEE PARAS 4 AND 5 BELOW).

3. HAROLD WILSON MET WITH HIS SHADOW CABINET YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. THEY ANNOUNCED THEY WERE READY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT AND SUBMIT THEIR PROGRAM TO PARLIAMENT FOR ENDORSEMENT. THEY CATEGORICALLY REJECTED COALITION OR A POLITICAL "DEAL" WITH ANY OTHER PARTY.

4. LABOR WILL HOLD 301 SEATS, THE LARGEST SINGLE BLOC IN THE NEW HOUSE OF COMMONS. THEY CAN ALSO COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF GERRY FITT, THE ONLY SDLP CANDIDATE ELECTED, AND EDDIE MILNE, A FORMER LABOR MP THE PARTY UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO PURGE. BOTH MEN HAVE SAID THEY WILL ACCEPT THE LABOR WHIP. THIS STILL LEAVES LABOR 15 VOTES SHORT OF THE 318 NEEDED FOR AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY.

5. THE CONSERVATIVES POLLED 250,000 MORE VOTES THAN LABOR (38.1 PERCENT TO 37.2 PERCENT) BUT WON ONLY 296 SEATS. THE LIBERALS POLLED MORE THAN HALF AS MANY VOTES AS EITHER OF THE MAJOR PARTIES (19.3 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL), FOR WHICH THEY SECURED A PITIFUL 14 SEATS. LIBERAL LEADER THORPE IS TO SEE HEATH THIS AFTERNOON. ANTI-SUNNINGDALE UNIONISTS SCORED A STUNNING UPSET IN NORTHERN IRELAND, WINNING ELEVEN OF THE TWELVE SEATS THERE. (THEY HAVE REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED THAT THEY INTEND TO ACT AS AN INDEPENDENT GROUP IN PARLIAMENT AND WILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAVE THEIR OWN WHIP.) SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS WON SEVEN SEATS AND WELSH NATIONALISTS TWO SEATS. THE REMAINING TWO SEATS WENT TO DICK TAVERNE AND THE SPEAKER.

6. AMONG THE MP'S DEFEATED IN THEIR BID FOR REELECTION WERE GORDON CAMPBELL, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND; TWO JUNIOR MINISTERS, KEITH SPEED AND NICK SCOTT; BOTH OF LABOR'S JUNIOR SPOKESMEN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, GORONWY

ROBERTS AND IVOR RICHARD; AND FIVE OF THE 69 LABOR MP'S WHO VOTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON THE KEY DIVISION IN OCTOBER 1971 TO TAKE BRITAIN INTO THE EC (ANOTHER 15 DID NOT STAND FOR REELECTION).

7. INITIAL PUBLIC REACTION TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS THAT HAS RESULTED FROM THE ELECTION IS ONE OF GREAT SOBRIETY; MOST PAPERS AND COMMENTATORS SEE CLEARLY THAT BRITAIN WILL BE FACING THE INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC CRISIS AHEAD WITH A WEAK GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL FIND IT HARD TO AVOID CALLING ANOTHER GENERAL ELECTION BEFORE THE YEAR IS OUT. NO PUBLIC CONSENSUS HAS YET EMERGED AS TO WHICH PARTY HAS THE BETTER MORAL RIGHT TO TRY TO FORM THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. NO ONE, HOWEVER, HAS CONTESTED HEATH'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO TRY.

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8. THE INDEPENDENT "TIMES," WHICH SUPPORTED HEATH DURING THE ELECTION, EDITORIALIZES THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS GIVE NEITHER MAJOR PARTY A PRESCRIPTIVE DEMOCRATIC RIGHT TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. RULING OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A GRAND COALITION (TORY-LABOR) AT THIS POINT, THE "TIMES" COMES DOWN, QUALIFIEDLY, IN FAVOR OF THE LABOR PARTY'S BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT TO MEET BRITAIN'S CRISIS. THE CONSERVATIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"DAILY TELEGRAPH" SAYS HEATH COULD EQUALLY HONORABLY RESIGN OR SOLDIER ON. IT URGES HIM TO TEST THE SITUATION AND GO AHEAD UNTIL HE IS STOPPED. THE CONSERVATIVE "DAILY EXPRESS" SAYS, RATHER UNREALISTICALLY WE THINK, THAT THE LEADERS OF THE TWO GREAT PARTIES SHOULD COME TOGETHER IN A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND SUBMERGE THEIR DEEP-ROOTED PERSONAL AND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION. THE LABOR-ORIENTED "DAILY MIRROR" SAYS THAT HEATH, HAVING CLEARLY FAILED TO GET THE RENEWED MANDATE HE ASKED FOR, SHOULD RESIGN.

9. COMMENT: THE ELECTORATE COULD SCARCELY HAVE DEvised A MORE UNSATISFACTORY, NOT TO SAY DANGEROUS, OUTCOME TO THE GENERAL ELECTION. NONE OF THE VARIOUS COMBINATIONS AVAILABLE TO THE PRIME MINISTER CAN HAVE MUCH APPEAL FOR HIM. ASSUMING THAT HE CAN ENLIST LIBERAL SUPPORT (AND THORPE HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED STATING WHAT PRICE HE MIGHT EXTRACT FOR SUCH SUPPORT), A CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL COMBINATION WOULD STILL BE EIGHT VOTES SHORT OF AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY. HEATH MIGHT CALCULATE THAT THE ELEVEN MILITANT PROTESTANT UNIONISTS WOULD NEVER PERMIT LABOR TO BRING DOWN A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT, BUT GIVEN THE BELLIGERENT AND IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR OF THOSE SAME PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY, THAT WOULD BE A HAZARDOUS CALCULATION ON WHICH TO BASE A GOVERNMENT.

10. BY THE SAME TOKEN, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW LONG A MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT COULD CARRY ON. THE VERY ENORMITY OF BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND THE NEED TO SETTLE THE MINERS' STRIKE MIGHT INDUCE ALL POLITICAL PARTIES TO ALLOW THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, WHATEVER ITS COMPOSITION, TO TAKE NECESSARY EMERGENCY MEASURES. FOR THE

LONGER HAUL, HOWEVER, MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT A SECOND
GENERAL ELECTION WILL BE NEEDED, POSSIBLY WITHIN MONTHS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COALITION GOVERNMENT, INTERIM GOVERNMENT, ELECTION RESULTS, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, ELECTIONS, DISPUTED ELECTIONS, ELECTORATE, NATIONAL ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LONDON02686
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740372/aaaacpgq.tel
Line Count: 227
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: LONDON 2639
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 JUL 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19-Jul-2001 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <04 JUN 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POLITICAL DEADLOCK
TAGS: PINT, UK, (HEATH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005